

Working Paper No. 35

# HOW TO CONCEIVE VILLAGE AS A UNIT OF INVESTIGATION INTO PROCESS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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## HOW TO CONCEIVE VILLAGE AS A UNIT OF INVESTIGATION INTO PROCESS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT?

G.P. Mishra

An understanding of the process of development or underdevelopment at the village level is needed for formulating a theory of policy for rural development. But the question is how to understand the process of development in villages when they are diverse in character and dissimilar in size and composition. An answer to this question may be sought if more and more village studies are conducted at the grass-root level. But how to conduct village studies for understanding the development process is another question to be resolved. The task may be easier if both, village and development are simultaneously conceived in the study as a unit of investigation into the process of rural development. Thus the purpose of this paper is to show how village should be conceived in its study as a unit of investigation into the process of development. This will help not only in understanding the process of development at the village level but also in formulating a theory of policy for rural development. In view of this idea, the following are discussed in this paper : village studies and their weaknesses, concept of development, and the conception of village as a unit of study in rural development.

## I. Village Studies and Their Weaknesses

The village studies conducted so far are either 'fact-finding' or 'problem-oriented!'<sup>1</sup> Thus they are either the sources of information and data or the studies concerned with the analysis of gaps which exist between development programmes and their performance at the grass-root level. In this way, they point out the problems confronting to the development of villages or they present a partial view about the state of underdevelopment which exists there. And so, they provide some insights into the study of the problems of development and underdevelopment prevailing in villages at a given point of time. But such village studies do not explain the process of development in villages as an integrated part of the spatio-social process of development operating in the rural society or economy as a whole.

The methodological debates among social scientists over the issue of how to conduct village studies as the units of investigation into the process of rural development have deviated them from investing villages as integral parts of the rural society which exists as a spatio-social aggregate. Social Anthropologists charge Economists for their model-building technocracy which makes them alien to comprehend the life style of village society. Hence they doubt Economists in comprehending the realities of village life style, as they cannot be quantified and formulised in the form of models. For comprehending the process of development or underdevelopment, what is needed most is observation as well as intros-

pection. That is why Social Anthropologists lay stress on the method of participant observation without which one interested in village studies may live an ivory tower. Economists blame Social Anthropologists for using the method of participant observation to study villages as isolates. And so, their studies based on the participant observation method are alleged to be closed and limited to castes, communities, families, traditions and culture. Whether village studies are based on the social anthropological methodology or on the sophistication of the model-building technocracy of economists, both of them use their own 'rackets' to shuttle the cock and play the game accordingly.

In village studies, what matters most is not the methodological consideration but the conceptualisation of village in the process of rural development. Both, Social Anthropologists and Economists make charges and counter-charges against each other on the methodological issue of how to conduct village studies in the fields and so they are least bothered about the question of how to conceive village as a unit of investigation into the process of rural development. Perhaps, economists are not bothered about this basic issues because of their faith in neo-classical paradigm; and Social Anthropologists have shown the least concern about the same because of the notion of 'encapsulation' of the villages or small groups normally studied by them within the 'wider economy' or by 'the State'. To quote John Harriss : "The effect of this is to abstract both 'village' (where this is the main unit of



study) and 'State' from reality and are not simply 'encapsulated' by it. The possibility that changes within villages could also bring about changes in the State - that village and state are joined in a dialectical unit - is ignored in the notion of encapsulation."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the notion of 'encapsulation' of villages within the wider economy and the faith in neo-classical paradigm respectively make them (Social Anthropologists and Economists) lose the sight of conceiving village as an integral part of aggregative spatio-social structure and so they fail to comprehend the process of development in villages as an integrated part of spatio-social process of development which operates in the rural economy as a whole.

## II. Concept of Development

Growth and development may be two different terms but conceptually they are inseparable and inextricable; as they possess a character of unity in the history of social existence and development. The history of social evolution and development which underlines material production and material reproduction process respectively as the starting point of social existence and social development, show growth in material production as the essential condition for the development of all types of societies. Hence assuming social development as a function<sup>of</sup> the social process of increase in production, the concept of growth is useful for conceptualising the term, economic development.

The concept of growth as the process of increase in material production has three dimensions : space, society and time (i.e. history). The spatial dimension of growth refers to geographical territory of a country or to geographical area of a region within a country wherein growth takes place. The societal dimension of growth implies growth in relation to the society that exists in a space. The time dimension of growth means the periodisation of history of development in the context of society-in-space. Thus the spatial and social dimensions of growth form a unity of existence through history or time, and so its historical dimension unfolds how society-in-space develops through the process of growth in material production resulting from different branches of production. Hence the concept of development implies spatio-social process of growth whereby output is produced and increases over a period of time.

Given this unity of existence, the spatio-social process of growth depends on the conditions in which output is produced and increases over time. The conditions of producing and increasing output are set out by the forces and relations of production. The use of given production forces characterises the techno-organisational form of production and the existing production relations show the socio-economic structure of production. Production conditions are a conjuncture of the given forces and relations of production and show that economic development depends on the technical form and socio-economic structure of production. Thus economic development



as a spatio-social process of growth in material production depends on the development of productive forces and the relations of different groups of people to using the forces of production in the process of material production. In other words, the process of development should be conceived in terms of a spatio-social process of growth in material production and it should emit the forces of production and production relations existing in society-in-space.

### III. Conception of Village in the Study of Development

How to conceive village as a unit of investigation into the process of development depends on two things : concept of development and the characterisation of village as the unit of rural society. The concept of development as defined above refers to a spatio-social process of growth in material production. This process of growth depending on the given conditions of production shows the given techno-organisational form and socio-economic structure of production as the main determining factors of development. Hence, while investigating village as a unit of study in rural development, the techno-organisational form and socio-economic structure of production should be taken into consideration. The village study based on these forces of development will explain the process of development which will, in turn, help in understanding the characteristic pattern of relations between the micro and macro processes of development in rural economy. In other words, the study of the village as the unit of investigation into the process of rural development based on these two factors of development will show

the characteristic pattern of relations between micro and macro spatio-social processes of development operating within the rural economy.

For conceiving village in the study of development, it should not be characterised merely as a micro spatial unit of rural settlements or households, having agriculture as the main source of occupation and livelihood. It should be defined as a unit of the system of social relations in material production. The content of the system of social relations in production lies in disclosing the 'inter-connectedness' of social relations among the village people in the process of production. The characteristic pattern or form of such 'inter-connectedness' following from the characteristic form of property relations discloses how village settlements or households are inter-dependent as well as differentiable. Moreover, this characteristic pattern of social relations also discloses the level of development as well as the state of underdevelopment in the village.

Why should the concerned village be characterised in terms of a unit of the system of social relations in production? The answer to this question is simple but logical and scientific. The existing characteristic pattern of social relations in production mediates all the characteristics of the village as a space and as a society which are generally described separately such as, geographical, caste-oriented, religious and tradition-bound, cultural characteristics, etc. Take the case of a tribal village or community. "The spontaneously evolved tribal community or, if you will, the herd - common ties of blood, language,

custom, etc. - is the first precondition of the appropriation of the objective conditions of life, and of the activity which reproduces and gives material expression to, or objectifies (vergegenständlichenden) it (activity as herdmen, hunters, agriculturalists, etc.). The earth is the great laboratory, the arsenal which provides both the means and the materials of labour, and also the location, the basis of the community. Men's relation to it is naive : they regard themselves as its communal proprietors, and as those of the community which produces and reproduces itself by living labour. In reality appropriation by means of labour takes place under these preconditions, which are not the product of labour but appear as its natural or devine preconditions."<sup>3</sup> If the case of shifting cultivation is taken into account relating to a tribal village, it refers to a form of social relations in agricultural production in which the existing geographical and ecological conditions of the village are mediated. All this show the tribal system of social relations wherein the transformation of natural objects into the material conditions for satisfying tribal people's needs is a product of the natural process of labour.

Let us take another example of the ancient village communities where there was a communal landownership and the caste-bound occupational functions were the basis of the division of labour. "The small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour . . .

The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities."<sup>4</sup> The caste-bound occupational functions of the ancient community formed a structural bondage of social relations of personal interdependence which were manifested in the Jajmani System. To quote Marx again : "In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common, and the produce divided among the members. At the same time, spinning and weaving were carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side, with the masses thus occupied with one and the same work, we find the chief inhabitant, who is judge, police and tax-gatherer in one; the book-keeper who keeps the accounts of the tillage and registers everything relating thereto; another official, who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities; the water-overseer, who distributes the water from the common tanks for irrigation; the Brahmin, who conducts the religious services; the schoolmaster, who on the sand teaches the children reading the writing; the calander-Brahmin, or astrologer, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed-time and harvest, and for every other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a carpenter, who make the repair all the agricultural implements; the potter, who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber, washerman, who washes clothes, the silver-smith, here and there the poet, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the schoolmaster. This dozen of individuals is maintained at the expenses of the whole community."<sup>5</sup>

What does all this imply? All this presents a picture about the system of social relations in production (as well as in distribution) wherein the so-called caste-bound occupations present a systematic division of labour and consequently, the socio-economic structure of production, viz. organisation for production in the village communities. "The simplicity of organisation for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up on the spot and with the same name . . ."<sup>6</sup> In this way, the existence of communal ownership in land, caste-oriented occupations and communal mode of cooperation disclose the characteristic pattern of social relations in production prevailing in the ancient Indian villages. The characteristic pattern of social relations in production is the characteristic of the stubborn Asiatic mode of production which shows not only the reproduction of the material existence of individuals but also a definite form of activity of the individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, and a definite form of life style as the coincidents of their production.

The conception of village as a unit of investigation into the process of development, thus, implies the study of village as a unit of investigation into the system of social relations in its production or into the existence of relationship between man and nature in the given society-in-space. While studying the village, the form of relationship between man and nature existing therein should not be encapsulated within the economy but it should be studied as an integrated part of an overall

relationship or socio-economic structure of production which exists in the economy as a whole at the point of time. This is possible only when the spatial and social dimensions of growth in material production are ascertained through the historical process of social evolution and development. In this context, the use of mode of production as a method of inquiry is relevant to village studies. Marx and Engels noted that "the mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the material existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite form of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are what they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce."<sup>7</sup>

The conception of village in the study of rural development, as discussed above, refers to two things : the study of village as an integrated part of the rural society or economy and the analysis of the process of development at the village level as a manifestation <sup>of</sup> the process of development in totality. For the first, the socio-economic structure of production at the village level should be considered along the socio-economic structure of production at the aggregative level of the economy. The second aspect of the study lays stress on the consideration of the social process of growth in material production (i.e. mode of production as it determines the social process of



growth) simultaneously at both levels, village as well as economy. The village being an integrated part of the rural society or economy and its development process being the manifestation of the whole development process of the economy, both of them are the coordinates of the total socio-economic structure and development process; as the historical dynamics of social development and change indicate. Hence the socio-economic structure of production in totality should be taken into account.<sup>8</sup> The socio-economic structure of production in totality identifies the mode of production and so it is useful for understanding the social process of rural development at micro and macro spatio-social levels.

As the history of social evolution and development in India shows, there may be the following socio-economic structures of production : Asiatic, feudal, semi-feudal, commercial capitalist, emerging dominant capitalist, and pure capitalist structures of production.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1 : Socio-Economic Structures of Production :

Their Typological Characteristics

Sl. Period No.	Structural Typologies	Nature of Economy and Structural Characteristics	Nature of Development and Underdevelopment
1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4
1.	Ancient India Asiatic Structure	Self-contained village economy; communal ownership in land; communal mode of production and distribution of subsistence output; union between agriculture and manufacturing, and between rural and urban; no difference between capital and labour; caste-bound occupations; predominance of nature; the same traditional technology and skills in agriculture and manufacturing; and reproduction of the same material existence of individuals.	Low and stagnant nature-imposed process of material reproduction and reproduction of natural poverty but shared by people within the communal framework of the village union.
2.	Pre-British Feudal Structure	Disintegration of the Asiatic communal ownership in land with the growth of the feudal form of property ownership; feudal-peasant relations in production; bondage of labour; maintenance of Jajmani system for maintaining a structure of social relations of personal dependence; feudal exploitation of peasants and rent as a source of money growth; value-in-use production of commodities; separation of labour from land; dominance of nature over man in society; reproduction of feudal conditions of material production; market relations of the 'Hat' (i.e. Bazar) economy; using consumption loans or gifts to make tenants and labour bonded to them.	Sterilised and exploitative process of production, and growth of natural poverty through the feudal process of peasant exploitation and using Jajmani system and other coercive methods to pauperise the peasants, tenants, and servants.

1	2	3	4	5
3. Early British	Semi-feudal Structure	Disintegrating feudal economy with the emergence of private form of landed property but still feudal lords dominate and live on usury and rent; growth of money and interest-bearing capital through money lending; a large number of poor peasants and tenants; expansion of commerce and trade; family labour-based farming; process of separation between countryside and town, and between agriculture and trade.	Stagnant development and growth of some artificial poverty in the midst of natural poverty.	
4. Late British	Commercial Capitalist Structure	Colonial economy with the characteristic pattern of relations in trade between the metropolis and periphery imposed on the semi-feudal structure of production in agriculture, the destruction of handicraft industries the growth of intermediate social structures like moneylenders and merchants, and the expansion of money-oriented market economy; growth of commercial agriculture and subordination of industries to commerce and trade (i.e. merchant capital), the emergence of the dual economy; perpetuation of traditional agricultural technology and practices; and the appearance of rigid caste hierarchy and emergence of labour market.	Development of metropolitan centres with peripheral underdevelopment, very restrictive process of industrialisation due to the growth of merchant capital, agricultural backwardness due to semi-feudal forces, reproduction of conditions to pauperise poor peasants through the feudal process of exploitation and labour due to intermediate structures, and so growth of artificial poverty with natural poverty.	

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1	2	3	4	5
5.	Post-Independent India	Emergent Capitalist Structure	<p>Market economy of emerging capitalism; diversification of economic structure and considerable growth of productive forces but growth of a dual economy; modern sectors and subsistence economy; growth of money capital and commerce with retarded process of industrialisation in rural areas; disintegration of caste-bound functions and semi-feudal dominance with liquidation of Jajmani system; proletarianisation as well as pauperisation; differentiation of rich and poor within the urban and rural economy.</p>	<p>Break in agricultural backwardness with high-yielding effects, unequal development process; aggravation of 'artificial poverty' as a consequence of development; pushing out poor from rural areas to urban areas, widening the gap between rich and poor; rural and urban dichotomy created; gradual conversion of natural poverty into artificial poverty.</p>

The above table shows an emergence of capitalism as a system-moulding force in the socio-economic structure of production in post-Independent rural India. As a result, capitalist production relations are emerging in the economy. But the appearance of such relations varies region to region within the economy and area to area within a given region. The inter-regional and intra-regional variations in the emergence of capitalist production relations are due to a number of factors such as the existence of a large number of family labour-based farms; growth of money capital, commerce and trade which holds back the process of accumulation and investment; the existence of household and village industries based on traditional technology and skills; lopsided land augmenting technological development in agriculture; restrictive process of rural industrialisation due to the growth of money capital, and promotion of traditional technology-cum-skill-based household and village industries; the existence of a wide gap of technological development between agriculture and industry; and the existence of semi-feudal elements in rural areas. As a consequence, the process of rural development presents a dual picture : the co-existence of development with underdevelopment at both levels : inter-regional and intra-regional. Such dual character of rural development could be found even at inter-village and intra-village levels.

All this shows that the village should be conceived as an integrated part of the capitalist structure of production which is emerging at the aggregative spatio-social level of



the rural economy. Given the structure of social relations in production, the factors causing the persistence of underdevelopment in the village should be identified. As the above analysis indicates, the semi-feudal elements and the characteristic pattern of social relations between intermediate social structure and agricultural production should be studied in the context of the concerned village. In other words, the complex of production, market and trade relations should be decomposed for showing how they are interrelated or interlocked in the village.

Lenin's theory of differentiation of peasantry<sup>10</sup> is useful to study villages in the context of rural development. Lenin has distinguished between six classes in the countryside; (i) agricultural proletariat, wage labourers, (ii) semi-proletariat or tiny peasants, (iii) small peasantry, (iv) middle peasant, (v) big or rich peasants, (vi) big landowners. The agricultural proletariat, wage labourers obtain their livelihood by hiring out their labour at capitalist farms. The semi-proletarians or tiny peasants operate small pieces of land and hire out their family labour for wages at capitalist farms. The small peasantry own and operate small holdings on the basis of their own family labour and produce subsistence output. The middle peasants operate medium sized holdings and mostly use their family in farm production. They also produce some surplus for converting it into capital. There are also certain cases in which they also employ hired-in labour. Rich peasants are decidedly capitalist entrepreneurs who employ hired-in labour and they themselves perform manual labour on their farms. There are also



big landowners who do not cultivate land themselves but lease out, and live on rent and usury. They are the descendants of the feudal lords or rich financial magnate, or else a mixture of both groups of exploiters. The six-fold classification of peasantry by Lenin is based on three coordinates of reference : family/wage labour, subsistence income/surplus income, and size of land holdings. The relative position of these classes in the village discloses two things : how the process of development takes place and why underdevelopment persists there. Their relative position will show how conditions of proletarianisation as well as pauperisation are reproduced in the village economy leading to the accentuation of artificial poverty in the midst of natural poverty.

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The characteristic pattern of relations between intermediate structures and production relations should also be considered in the study of the village. Interest-bearing capital and merchant capital are the main characteristics of the intermediate structures existing in the village. The first grows through the process of money lending. If the landlords also function as moneylenders, they may pauperise poor peasants and labourers by making them bonded to loans which they generally take for consumption purposes. In this case, the poor peasants and labourers remain exploited leading to pauperisation. If commerce and trade grow at a fast rate, there may be an emergence of merchant class. The merchant class deals with purchase and sale of commodities which leads to the growth of merchant capital. The characteristic feature of merchant capital lies in the circuit of M-C-M'. That is to say, with the money (M) they purchase commodities (C)

for selling them in the market for more money ( $M'$ ). The difference between  $M$  and  $M'$  ( $M'-M$ ) is merchant capital. They use this money for hoarding commodities or assets or they expend it on luxurious items. In either case, the merchants hold back the process of development and create coercive methods to pauperise peasants and labourers. If the growth of merchant capital through commerce and trade dominates the commodity economy; the whole development process becomes restricted in the village. In villages, mostly a lower form of merchant capital is found in terms of intermediaries or middlemen. Hence the development of the villages are arrested for a long period of time. The artisans, household and other industries also get disintegrated under the growth of intermediate structures like merchants, intermediaries and middlemen. Hence in villages, the hand-in-glove type of social relations between rich peasants or landlords and merchants or traders or intermediaries lead to an uneven process of development which shows the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poor. In other words, the co-occurrence of development and underdevelopment is the characteristic of the emerging capitalist structure of production at the micro and macro spatio-social levels of the rural economy, though such socio-economic structure of production will vary from one region to another within the rural economy and from one area to another within a given region.

#### IV. Conclusion

How to conceive village as a unit of study in rural development depends on the concept of development and the characterisation of village not an isolate but as an integrated part of the socio-

economic structure of production which exists in the rural economy at a large. The concept of development should not be narrow but broad; and so it should be defined as a spatio-social process of growth in material production. Assuming this conceptual fraemwork of development, the village as a unit of investigation into the process of rural development should be conceived as an integrated part of the socio-economic structure of production in totality.

The historical evolution of social development in India shows how capitalism as a system-moulding force in the socio-economic structure of production has emerged in post-Independent India. The tabular representation of the historically evolved socio-economic structures of production points out an emergence of the capitalist structure of production in rural India. Given this structure, how development and underdevelopment co-occur in the economy as a whole is shown in Table 1.

Conceiving village as an integrated part of the rural economy and so of the same structure of production, the following should be studied : production relations and the relationship between the complex of production relations and intermediate social structures. An investigation into these two at the micro level will expose why development co-exists with underdevelopment and what steps should be taken up to overcome the built-in or created resistences to an overall development of the village as a space and as a society.

### Notes and References

1. "Village studies are conducted with diverse objectives by scholars from different social science discipline : economists, sociologists, political scientists, geographers, nutritionists, specialists in village administration, etc., individually or jointly as a team, with or without interdisciplinary perspective. Broadly speaking, these can be classified into two broad categories according to their objectives : fact-finding empirical studies and problem-oriented studies. A majority of village studies belong to the first category, which are often undertaken without any clear idea about how the data would be processed, analysed and presented. In recent years, the widespread dissatisfaction with all-purposive fact-finding village studies has encouraged more of problem-oriented studies which are geared to testing specific hypotheses and policy-formulating objectives (e.g. the impact of high yielding varieties of seeds on productivity and employment)." Biplab Dasgupta (ed.), Village Studies in the Third World, Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India), Delhi, 1978, pp.3-4.
2. John Harriss, "Why Poor Stay Poor in Rural South India", Social Scientist, August 1979, p.20.
3. Marx, "Pre-Capitalistic Economic Formation (1958)" in Howard Selsam-David Goldway-Harry Martel (selected and edited), Dynamics of Social Change, International Publishers (New York) 1975, pp.208-9.
4. Marx, Capital, Vol.I, Progress Publisher (Moscow), 1965, p.357.
5. Ibid., p.357.
6. Ibid, p.357.
7. Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, pp.31-2.
8. "First of all, we believe that a mode of production should be identified on the basis of the relations of production. The relations of production are the ganglion of the socio-economic system, and it is only by focussing primarily on them and one is able to determine the laws of motion of any social formation". Dipanker Gupta, 'Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital : The Instance of Share-cropping', Economic and Political Weekly, September 27, 1980, p.A-98. For detail, please see this paper.
9. The capitalist structure of production has not grown in its pure sense of the term in rural India. Hence, this one is not considered here.
10. For details, please see Lenin's book, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Progress Publishers, Moscow, and also Ranjit Sau, 'On the Agrarian Question in India-IV', The Frontier, July 28, 1978.



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